

# The role of the critic

Comm 8210-002

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office hours (253 Ford): TuTh 10-11:15a, W 10-11:30a, and by appointment

# Syllabus

Spring 2012

## Course description and objectives

This course will examine the various roles that intellectual work plays in contemporary culture and society. In particular, we will wrestle with the following questions:

- What value (if any) does our research have beyond the walls of our campuses? What can (or should) we do to bridge that gap more effectively?
- What is the proper role for the university in contemporary US society? What does this role imply for those of us who work within higher education?
- What does it mean to be a “public intellectual”? Does US society need such creatures? Does the academy want to spawn them? Should we aspire to be them?
- Who is the audience for our intellectual work? Who should it be? Is “audience” even the right word to use to describe this relationship?
- How can we more effectively disseminate our intellectual work to a broader public? What changes in our writing practices and/or our research agendas are mandated by such a project?
- In whose interest should we be working? Our own? The state’s? The public’s? The highest bidder’s?
- What happens to intellectuals in the digital age? How do new media technologies help and/or hinder our work?

## Grading policy

Presumably, you’re enrolled in this course because you genuinely want to be here, and so you’re motivated by something other than the desire to add another A to your transcript -- and that’s the way it should be. And so I assume that it’s counter-productive for me to make you worry about letter grades. As of Day One, you begin the course with an A. If you show up for all our class meetings, participate productively in our discussions, and complete the required written work in satisfactory and timely fashion, you’ll keep that A. That said, in cases where people clearly slack off, I reserve the right to go deeper into the alphabet when I submit final grades. Under such unfortunate circumstances, your grade will be calculated using the following formula:

Attendance/participation	15%
Discussion questions	10%
Public blog	75%

## Readings

The following required books are available at the University Bookstore in Coffman Union:

- Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence*
- Rius, *Marx for Beginners*
- Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*
- Ziauddin Sardar & Borin van Loon, *Introducing Cultural Studies*
- Ellen Willis, *Out of the Vinyl Deeps*
- Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*

Other required readings will be made available in class and/or via the course website.

## Attendance/participation

Our weekly meetings will be oriented around seminar-style discussions, rather than formal lectures. Your primary responsibility each week will be to show up prepared to contribute thoughtfully and productively to our conversations about the assigned readings. You don’t need to demonstrate perfect mastery of the issues raised by our readings, but you are expected to participate in our conversations actively and regularly. I’ll chime in often enough that you’ll certainly get my take on our readings, but this course will not be a spectator event for any of us.

## Course website

We will conduct a significant amount of discussion and course business online via a Coursekit website. Among other things, the website will serve as:

- a central “bulletin board” for official course announcements,
- a place to post your discussion questions (see below) for any given week’s readings,
- a space for starting, continuing, and/or augmenting our in-class conversations, and
- a site for mutual support and feedback with respect to your course-related research and writing.

Ideally, the website should function as a space that’s serious enough for people to share extended thoughts on the course material, but also casual enough for people to post quick comments and “in progress” ideas. Full details on how to access and contribute to our course website are available on a separate handout.

## Discussion questions

We have 14 weeks of scheduled reading this semester (24 Jan-1 May). For at least 10 of those 14 weeks, you should post 2-3 discussion questions related to those readings to the course blog by 2:30 pm the day before the relevant class meeting. Exactly what those questions should look like will vary from topic to topic (and from student to student), but you should be aiming for questions that serve as productive jumping-off points for our in-class discussions.

## Public blog

In the context of a course devoted to public intellectual work, it seems counterproductive to require you to write a traditional 25-30 page scholarly research paper. Instead, your major writing assignment for this semester will be to start and maintain a public blog that is primarily focused on at least one aspect of your career-in-the-making as a professional academic/intellectual/scholar. The basic requirements are as follows:

- You should be the sole author of your blog (i.e., no group blogs, no guest blogging).
- Your blog should be up and running (i.e., visible to the world and with at least one post already online) no later than 31 January.
- Ideally, you should advertise your blog in some public forum that isn’t solely populated by people you already know (e.g., somewhere other than your Facebook profile or the department listserv). At the very least, you need to share your blog’s address with the rest of the class.
- You should post a minimum of 1000 words each week that are clearly and significantly related to your intellectual/scholarly interests and/or expertise. [N.B.: This doesn’t preclude the occasional personal or “off-topic” digression. After all, an awful lot of very serious blogs still contain moments of pure whimsy. But these should be the exception, rather than the rule.]

There are many, many places online that provide free server space for would-be bloggers. The UMN Library is one of them (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu>). If you’d rather not have your blog housed on University servers (for whatever reason), two of the biggest free blogging sites are Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>) and WordPress (<http://www.wordpress.com>), but you are free to use whatever blogging service and/or platform you choose.

[N.B.: If you already have a blog, you’re free to use it for purposes of this assignment, provided that you (and your blog) still meet the requirements described above. If you would prefer for your blog to appear under a pseudonym, that’s fine in terms of the general public, but you do need to attach your real name to your blog in the context of this course.]

## Miscellaneous

- If you wish to, you may make audio recordings of our class meetings, provided you can do so without disrupting the ordinary flow of the class. The purchase and/or sale of either written notes or audio recordings of our class meetings, however, is strictly prohibited.
- I will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students’ needs relating to religious holidays and/or documented disabilities. By University policy, you must provide me with written notice (for religious holidays) and/or official documentation (for disabilities), and you must do so with enough lead time for such accommodations to be arranged.

# Reading schedule

## Introduction

### 17 January

Daniel W. Drezner, "Public Intellectual 2.0"

## What is writing for?

### 24 January

Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*

Edward W. Said, "The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals"

Michael Bérubé, "Bite-Size Theory: Popularizing Academic Criticism"

Michael Bérubé, "Cultural Criticism and the Politics of Selling Out"

### 31 January

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

Antonio Gramsci, "The Intellectuals"

George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"

George Orwell, "Why I Write"

### 7 February

Jonathan Sterne, "Blogging 101 for Academics"

assorted academic blogs

## What are universities for?

### 14 February

Michael Bérubé and Janet Lyon, "Free Speech and Discipline: The Boundaries of the Multiversity"

Stuart Hall, "The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis in the Humanities"

Joe Moran, "Cultural Studies and Academic Stardom"

Cary Nelson and Stephen Watt, *Academic Keywords* [selections]

Marc Bousquet, "Students Are Already Workers"

Gordon Lafer, "Sorely Needed: A Corporate Campaign for the Corporate University"

Andrew Ross, "Global U"

### 21 February

Paulo Freire, "Chapter 2" [*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*]

bell hooks, "Engaged Pedagogy"

Henry A. Giroux, "Doing Cultural Studies: Youth and the Challenge of Pedagogy"

Elizabeth Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering?: Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy"

Lisa Henderson, "Communication Pedagogy and Political Practice"

Lawrence Grossberg, "Teaching the Popular"

Elizabeth Bell, Kim Golombisky, G'han Singh, and Krista Hirschmann, "To All the Girls I've Loved Before: Academic Love Letters on Mentoring, Power, and Desire"

## What are publishers for?

### 28 February

William Germano, *Getting It Published* [selections]

Meaghan Morris, "Publishing Perils, and How to Survive Them: A Guide for Graduate Students"

Thom Brooks, "Publishing Advice for Graduate Students"

Cary Nelson, "The Economics of Textbook Reform"

Gilbert B. Rodman, "Tyrannosaurus Text: Publishers, Profits, and Pedagogy"

Ted Striphas, "Acknowledged Goods: Cultural Studies and the Politics of Academic Journal Publishing"

Siva Vaidhyanathan, "The Googlization of Knowledge: The Future of Books"

## **6 March**

Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence*

## **13 March**

**NO CLASS -- SPRING BREAK**

### **Speaking in (lay) tongues**

#### **20 March**

Greg Seigworth, assorted "Fear of a Blank Planet" columns

Michael Bérubé, "Pop Goes the Academy: Cult Studs Fight the Power"

Michael Bérubé, "Just the Fax, Ma'am: Or, Postmodernism's Journey to Decenter"

Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water* [selections]

Micaela di Leonardo, "Patterns of Culture Wars"

Micaela di Leonardo, "Margaret Mead vs. Tony Soprano"

Cathy Davidson, "Project Classroom Makeover"

#### **27 March**

Ellen Willis, *Out of the Vinyl Deep*s

Ellen Willis, "Intellectual Work and the Culture of Austerity"

#### **3 April**

Rius, *Marx for Beginners*

Ziauddin Sardar & Borin van Loon, *Introducing Cultural Studies*

### **Intellectual work and/as politics**

#### **10 April**

Lawrence Grossberg, "Cultural Studies: What's in a Name (One More Time)"

Bill Readings, "Culture Wars and Cultural Studies"

Constance Penley, "From NASA to The 700 Club (With a Detour Through Hollywood): Cultural Studies in the Public Sphere"

Michael Rustin, Doreen Massey, Jeremy Gilbert, and Stuart Hall, plenary session from the "Cultural Studies Now" conference

Raymond Williams, "The Future of Cultural Studies"

Gilbert B. Rodman, "Cultural Studies Is Ordinary"

#### **17 April**

Gerald Graff, "Academic Writing and the Uses of Bad Publicity"

Cornel West, "The Postmodern Crisis of the Black Intellectuals"

George Lipsitz, "Taking Positions and the War of Position: The Politics of Academia"

Meaghan Morris, "Politics Now (Anxieties of a Petty-Bourgeois Intellectual)"

Michael Bérubé, "Entertaining Cultural Criticism"

Andrew Ross, "No Respect: An Introduction"

Carol Becker, "The Artist As Public Intellectual"

### **Going digital?**

#### **24 April**

Henry Jenkins, "Quentin Tarantino's *Star Wars*?: Grassroots Creativity Meets the Media Industry"

David Gauntlett, "The Meaning of Making III: Digital"

Lawrence Lessig, *Remix* [selections]

Gary Hall, *Digitize This Book!* [selections]

Anne Balsamo, *Designing Culture* [selections]

#### **1 May**

individual class blogs

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